



## Nice Comp Ansel, But I Would Have Used Color Film

Copyright Mark Hobson. All rights reserved.

Photographic pearls of wisdom are where you find them and a mother lode (bed?) of pearls was just waiting to be discovered in [Lens Work](#) (Issue No. 50 Dec03-Jan04), a beautiful and noteworthy bimonthly photography publication. Editor Brook Jensen reflected on 34 years in photography with a random list of 131 things he's learned in an article aptly titled, *Things I've Learned About Photography (Revised, 10 Years Later)*. The list is composed of his original thoughts mixed with a few from authors he credits. He calls these thoughts personal and experimental, and suggests that they may not be true for everyone. His rationale for publishing them is to stimulate thought, an item that he declares to be "of some small value."

Small value, indeed. So, for thought/discussion starters, how about this item from Jensen's list?

*When showing their work to another photographer, they will often try to help by offering comments about how they would have done it. This is the epitome of insensitivity.*

The first supposition about "how I would have done it" seems to have particular significance for Image Critique Forums found on sites such as NPN, ample evidence is found here, and on other sites, to support his contention. Just a brief dip in the critique pool on NPN yields up these "IW"s; I would ...crop just a bit off ...just try to darken ...consider cropping it out, making it a panoramic...crop the horizon line ...try a ND filter ...be tempted to clone out ... - all copied and pasted directly from just three NPN image posts. If one were to include the "I would prefer" and "I would like", which are in the same spirit as the "IW", the evidence in support of Jensen's point is not just obvious, it is overwhelmingly so.

Certainly such "IW"s are suggestions, not directives, given in the spirit of "helping others learn." And, yes, they are most often couched in phrases such as the ubiquitous "IMO" to avoid direct offense to the creator of the photograph and to also avoid the appearance of self-aggrandizement on the part of the other photographer who steps into his role of Critic.

So, what's wrong with that? Surely the etiquette is proper and to form, and the "suggestions" sincere. So, why does Jensen assert that "*This is the epitome of insensitivity*"?

At least part of the answer can be found in another item from his list - *The quality of a photograph is inversely proportional to the amount of intellect used and directly proportional to the amount of intuition used when composing it.*

All great art has the artist's heart and soul as its wellspring. The artist's connection to his art and subject matter is preternatural and subconscious. Most can not fully explain why they do what they do, or what drives them to do it, but, they do know that they are driven, oft times compulsively, to do so. In short, they create their art intuitively. As one writer (I believe Red Smith) once said, "Writing is easy. I just sit down in front of a typewriter and open a vein."

Indeed, art created with this kind of passion and commitment is a very personal matter. Great artists write, paint, compose, and photograph what they "feel" about their subject matter. And, while some artists may claim to have carefully selected their subject matter, in truth, their subject matter, has most often chosen them.

Therein lies at least part of the answer to our question. True artists are not creating photographs, they are presenting to us, usually complete strangers, their inner most feelings and emotions. They are trying to establish a narrative, a dialogue, to express what they feel about their subject. To begin our response to this narrative with how you would express yourself *is* insensitive, and, to the artist, completely irrelevant.

It would be much better if we can learn to "listen" to what an artist is trying to say. Then we can take a giant step towards appreciating and understanding Art.

When you make your next image critique, why not start by asking yourself what you perceive the photographers intent to be. Then open a dialogue. Respect that the photographer has created something of value. Tell him how the photograph makes you feel and grant him respect for his art by asking him why he did what he did. Ask him about what he was attempting to say, *even if it seems obvious*, because things are not always what they seem to be.

Learning then becomes a two-way street.

As *artists*, we will inevitably learn from formulating a response to thoughtful questions about our work. We are challenged to identify our vision. In the process, we learn about ourselves when we confront our actions/decisions in creating our art and then define the reasoning behind them. If, indeed, all great art comes from inside, artists have to do the dirty work of digging it all out. No one can tell anyone else how to do it.

As *viewers and critics* of photography, our ability to appreciate, interpret and understand the work of others will be enhanced by learning about the varied and often fascinating motivations and intents of other photographers. We can then begin to get beneath the surface of photographs, where, most often, the real narrative lies. Others have much more than technique and craft to teach us about photography. Be humble and realize that even the neophyte, who still may be learning technique and craft, may have something to tell you that you might not already know.

By taking this approach to our critiques, we might even overcome the greatest barrier we have to understanding, appreciating and creating great photography - looking at photographs through the eyes of a photographer. Always remember another, and, perhaps the most important item from Jensen's list -

*Emotions are more important than details.*

**What do you think? [Join the conversation!](#)**

MH-NPN 1196

---



MARK HOBSON is a family guy lucky enough to be living in his favorite place on earth, the Adirondacks. A former agency creative director and commercial photographer, Mark has brought his love of the wilderness and photography together to form Nessmuk & Stoddard Trekking.

Mark's photography has been used by Fortune 500s such as Kodak, Xerox, Heinz, PPG, and Bausch & Lomb. As a creative director he has produced campaigns for clients such as; I LOVE NY, Lake Placid, The Adirondacks, Cooperstown and the Finger Lakes.

His Adirondack photography has been exhibited in galleries in the NE. He has won recognition as a repeat finalist in the Carnegie International Nature Photo Competition. Mark has also been a judge for the Kodak International Snapshot Competition as well as the Kodak Camera Club.

Be sure to visit Mark's website at [www.adirondacklight.net](http://www.adirondacklight.net).

Comments on NPN nature photography articles? Send them to the [editor](#).

[Site Map](#) • [NPN Membership](#) • [Front Page](#) • [Reader's Forum](#) • [Links](#) • [Gift Shoppe](#) • [Online Portfolios](#)

Copyright 2000 - 2004, Nature Photographers Online Magazine, Inc. All rights reserved.